

## SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS—THE FORBIDDEN LAND

The newspapers of 23rd January reported the death of Dr Ernest A. Baker and paid their tributes to him. His principal work was said to be *A History of the Novel* but he is better known as a mountaineer and for his books *Moors, Crags and Caves of the High Peak* and *The Highlands with Rope and Rucksack*. Last named was published in 1923. Then, as he later wrote, "although I took up my pen first as a mountaineer protesting against unsportsmanlike obstacles put in one's way by so-called sportsmen, sympathy and indignation made it impossible to ignore the more infamous wrong done to a whole people. The state of things is so monstrous and the facts set down were so indisputable that appeals came from unexpected quarters that this introductory chapter should be reprinted and issued separately." In this wise in 1924 the booklet *The Forbidden Land* (H. F. & G. Witherby, London) appeared from which with acknowledgements to the publishers we give the extracts that follow :—

IN THE early decades of last century and before, the mountains and moorlands of Scotland were as free and open as the seashore. At that time there were only five ancient deer-forests in the whole of Scotland, and the ground devoted solely to deer was high and poor and of no great area. Deer were plentiful, but lived for the most part in the wilderness, although they had the run of the whole country ; and, by a system of give and take, the cattle were allowed on the high ground in the summer, so long as they were brought in winter to the lower valleys.

Rents were low, and were often paid partly in kind, and the inhabitants of the little townships had the right to summer their stock in the higher glens. This happy state of things began to come to an end in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The first stage of the revolution which at length turned one-fifth of the entire soil of Scotland and the greater part of the highland country into a rich man's preserve was the creation of large sheep-farms and the expulsion of the old inhabitants to make way for the speculative farmer, who required only a handful of shepherds on land that had hitherto supported hundreds.

The tale of the highland clearances has often been told, and is now familiar to Scotsmen from Alexander Mackenzie's history, published in 1883, though the first-hand account, written by one of the eye-witnesses and victims, Donald Macleod, was long suppressed by powerful influences. To do it justice I should need the pen of a friend of mine whose grandfather was born in the heather, while his mother saw her home go up in flames, during the eviction on the Sutherland estates. This notorious Sutherlandshire business was carried through in the years 1814-18, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, in which the Sutherlandshire Highlanders had fought with distinction all over the world. Some fifteen thousand persons were thus driven from their homes and the farms that had maintained them, and planted on the seashore to furnish the terrible crofter problem of later days. Elsewhere the same process went on ; indeed, the process of depopulation has gone on to this day, for when sheep-farming on the great scale ceased to be lucrative, in the middle of last century, the formation of deer-forests on a still larger scale led to a further reduction in the number of inhabitants required on the land.

The vastness of the total area given over to deer-forest is now (written 1923) so the Report of the Departmental Committee shows, a little below the maximum registered in 1912, when it reached 3,584,966 acres, that is, one-fifth of the area of Scotland. There are now 189 scheduled forests, comprising 3,432,385 acres, of which, be it noted, one-third lies below the thousand-foot contour line. Out of 2,616,000 acres in Inverness-shire, more than a million are under deer. There were more deer in

Scotland in 1914 than ever before in history. But the figures quoted do not give all the truth, for not all the mountains and moors where deer are shot come into the category of deer-forest. Skye, for example, is not in the list ; and many another estate where there are some cattle and some sheep escapes the obloquy attaching to the name.

The aim of the owners of deer-forests is to create a huge solitude, first by removing such of the human population and their stock as survived the great clearances, and then by closing the mountains and glens to the public. They have succeeded in doing this throughout large portions of ten counties. Of the 543 Scottish peaks attaining the Munro standard of 3,000 feet above sea-level, nearer five than four hundred are situated in this forbidden land. The most beautiful and fascinating mountains of Scotland are so inaccessible to the lover of nature, through the jealousy with which they are guarded by those who seem to have little eye for their beauty and fascination that their very names are strange and uncouth to the tourist's ear. Suilven and Canisp, those marvellously coloured pyramids of western Sutherland ; An Teallach, the most rugged and magnificent group on the British mainland ; the purple sandstone mountains of Glen Torridon, unapproachable Liathach and Ben Alligin ; Ben Eighe, the shapeliest cluster of peaks in the Highlands ; Coulin Forest and the Fannichs, wildernesses of 3,000 feet tops ; Scour Ouran, the Saddle, Ben Screel, Larven, each name standing for a dozen neighbours that must be nameless here : all these incomparable mountains are to be looked at from afar, but climbed at your peril. . . . Ross-shire alone contains ninety-five peaks of the 3,000 feet standard, of which it is doubtful whether one but Ben Wyvis can be ascended without fear of an interdict. . . . In the middle of Scotland, mighty Ben Alder and his brethren are strictly prohibited. . . . Westward again, the peaks of Mamore and of Glencoe are proscribed. Buchaille Etive, on whose tremendous face is the best rock-climb in Scotland, has, since the fame of that climb reached the ears of its proprietor, been denied to the scrambler, like the neighbouring peaks of Black Mount Forest.

In the historic debate on deer-forests, it came out that in the Braemar district the villagers were unable to obtain fresh milk for their children, and had to use Swiss milk, because the pastures were wanted to grow fodder for the winter feed of the deer. Tourists are stopped on unfrequented paths that are well-known to the inhabitants to be established rights of way, unscrupulous agents taking advantage of the stranger's ignorance. For a long while the public were warned off the excellent driving roads that intersect the attractive forest region of Rothiemurchus and Glenmore.

In one case in the Rothiemurchus region a highway passing in front of a shooting-lodge has been cut off by gates, and transformed by every artifice into the semblance of a private drive, with such success that even the local Jehus are taken in—or, perhaps, have to appear so. In Glen Lonan, near Oban, gates across a popular and well-authenticated high-road have been kept uniformly locked during the shooting season.

In Glen Tanar, a late landowner built a house across the old road up the valley, with gates on either side. A right of way which he could not venture to stop leads across the glen higher up, from Ballater to Mount Keen. Where this intersects the old glen road, he put up a notice warning tourists of the danger of getting shot.

The island of Rum, the spires and pinnacles of which

are such a familiar sight to the traveller by MacBrayne's steamers, is entirely closed. You cannot even land on this magnificent island, the most mountainous of all after Skye; ninety-seven per cent. of its area is stated to be given up to deer and grouse, and the total population is less than a hundred.

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We find that there has been no remission of the inhuman pressure on the inhabitants of the glens, and no check to the depopulation of the Highlands since the period of the great clearances: the deadly work has gone steadily on; and, if the rate of extermination has been slightly reduced at any time since 1850 or 1870 or 1900, it has only been because there was a smaller population left to extinguish. Terrible facts came to light in the examination of witnesses when the Royal Commissions were sitting, of which a few may be cited as examples.

A delegate from the crofters in Strath Halladale, Sutherlandshire, told the Commissioners in 1892 that 45,000 acres of this valley had been turned into a sheep farm, let to an absentee, and 8,000 acres of that area were subsequently turned into deer-forest. Sixty families had formerly supported themselves in comfortable circumstances on this land. The middle portion of the strath had been secured to the crofters under the Crofters Act; the area on either side, which had once been so fruitful, was now a desert. Another witness was Colin Chisholm, a man of eighty, who was one of those driven out from Glen Cannich in 1832, when that beautiful glen, together with Strathglass and Glen Strathfarrar, was cleared. (Details of this testimony are quoted.) From Glen Strathfarrar, Chisholm's brother stated, Fraser of Lovat got two hundred volunteers to fight with Wolfe at Quebec: "The glen would not provide two to-day."

The Chisholm estate, held by the modern representative of the old clan chieftains, the late Mrs. Chisholm, comprised 113,000 acres, of which 80,000 were devoted solely to deer. To this potentate the poor people of Cannich sent a petitioner in the person of the Free Church minister, humbly praying that she would grant grazing for one cow, and potato-ground, to some ten men in the district. The inhabitants of the hamlet could only get milk for their children from a distance. The application was couched in the meekest terms, and the villagers were evidently loath to address any appeal to the Commission then about to sit. It met with a blank refusal. The factor on the estate explained to the commissioners that it was impossible to re-establish men on the patches of arable land on the fringes of the forest, because they were required for the wintering of the deer.

On the Balfour estate of Strathconan, 27 families, a community of 123 persons, were ejected at one fell swoop, some to emigrate, the others to settle on miserable crofts in the Black Isle, where they kept themselves alive on plots of land reclaimed from the heather. An old man remembered how 800 people over sixteen years of age signed the roll when a new minister was inducted. Now there were a hundred square miles of deer-forest, employing a small number of men as gillies; the sheep were almost entirely gone, and only about two shepherds were employed.

Vast sheep farms not yet given over to deer, and shooting ground not scheduled as forest, are responsible for a desolation almost as complete. In ten years from 1901 to 1911, the population of Inverness Landward dropped from 5,801 to 3,736. It is the same story from Inverness-shire to Wester Ross, and away into Caithness and Sutherlandshire. Wheresoever the tourist or the climber wanders, he will come across innumerable

larachs, heaps of stones half-buried in moss and heather marking the sites of old hamlets. Quantities of good land lie buried away in the forests: a friend who is a first authority on the subject, and much more interested in deer than in the restoration of agriculture, admits that there are a million reclaimable acres in the area at present held for sport.

There must be something vicious in an economic system the by-product of which is that amazing anachronism, a country of the size of the Highlands stripped of its inhabitants, its natural resources squandered, and the whole turned into a rich man's preserve. Is there anything like it elsewhere on the face of the globe? On the fringes of the pleasure-ground, on the seashore, and in the barren islands, the relics of the old population are living in miserable cabins—those who are not among the small number employed on the great sporting estates—and fighting a losing battle with poverty and starvation. Great modern castles and mansions stand ready to receive the lord of the deer-forest and his guests during the six weeks or two months of the season. Finely engineered roads wind away into the glens, bridges worthy of Telford cross rivers and torrents, telephone poles lead to the distant shooting-lodge or bothy—all the apparatus of luxury is there, representing an enormous expenditure of wealth, lavished, not on any productive or social object, but simply on the pastime of a few people who are determined to keep out and keep under the many.

To say that the Highlands are still under feudalism would be unfair to the feudal system. That may have been oppressive, but its spirit was protection, and between the feudal chief and his retainers there was something akin to the patriarchal feeling of the old clan regime. But the system that reigns now in the Highlands is one of indifference, if not of hostility. Such loyalty as exists depends entirely on the cash nexus, and the natural results of this are being seen of late in their most revolting form. No finer men could be found anywhere in the British Isles than the Highland forester or gillie of a quarter of a century ago—men of grand physique, inured to fatigue and exposure, intelligent and courteous to a degree rare in that rank of life. To-day, with forests changing hands perhaps from season to season; with new tenants coming for the weeks of shooting, and with their mob of guests flinging money—and whisky—about wholesale, deterioration is setting in—greed, servility, and contempt for all but their pay-masters, such is the inevitable product of callous indifference and self-indulgence.

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Discussing remedies that are proposed Dr Ernest Baker said: "Mere access to the mountains and moorlands might remove a painful inconvenience; it can be only a first step toward curing a deep-seated disease." As for abolition of the game laws it would be "a violent and questionable remedy, which cannot be guaranteed to furnish the positive incentives that would be required for a new state of things." And he further said "The favourite prescription of the advanced economist is the scientific taxation of land values," a measure which "would probably be carried out at once if the Scottish people were at liberty to decide upon their own affairs." He quoted with approval the postscript which one courageous member of the 1892 Royal Commission added to the report by his colleagues, this member saying: "The joint right of the highland clansmen with the landlords to the land has, so far as existing crofters are concerned, been recognised, and to some extent been given effect to by the Crofters Act. But with respect to the land cleared for sheep and deer,



and constituting an area much more extensive, valuable, and fertile than that presently in the occupation of crofters, the landlords have appropriated the clansmen's rights and interests in it without payment or compensation of any kind. The solution of the highland problem is not land purchase, but resumption of the clansmen's right to occupy the Fatherland"; and added that the urgent need was restoration, and the re-opening of the country would help to bring that about. The conclusion of the matter is in this final extract we take from *The Forbidden Land* :—

"The fundamental and permanent cause is congestion on the land, congestion upon bits of barren soil to which the smallholders of happier days were relegated in order that wide stretches may now be reserved for sport.

Men within the last few months (written in 1924) have gone to prison because they could not get holdings, and tried to save themselves from starvation by tilling scraps of the sporting domain. The sportsman says that this land is useless for agriculture; the squatter is ready to try his luck. Is it better that he should starve, or have his passage paid by charity to a more hospitable country? Is depopulation still to go on for the sake of the few? Are the millions of acres suitable for one kind of agriculture or another, or for afforestation, to remain productive of only a small amount of venison and some thousand brace of grouse? This is a sterner question than whether the rest of it shall remain closed to the multitudes who might find rest and refreshment amidst its natural beauty, in spite of all drawbacks of climate."

## THE IMPRISONMENT OF MATTHEU ALONSO

LAST MONTH we were able to give only the "stop press" news that Professor Mattheu Alonso was alive and well although under duress. He and Mr. Baldomero Argente should have attended as Spanish representatives the International Conference on Land Value Taxation and Free Trade in London, September, 1936, but their journey was stopped and nothing could be heard of them at the time. Long since then letters have come from Baldomero Argente that he is well and free and occupied on his literary work, but friends outside Spain had despaired of Mattheu Alonso for lack of any satisfactory word during the past five years. Most gratifying therefore was the news reported in *Land and Freedom* (New York), December issue, that a letter had arrived from Mattheu Alonso himself. Here is the story of his experiences as he relates them :—

"Since September, 1936—that is, within the Period of the Revolution—I was here at Tarragona, working as professor at the Instituto y Escuela Normal del Magisterio, and also working at my profession of Law. I used Henry George's books in my classes, both for comment and translation.

"When General Franco's troops entered Tarragona, accusations and indictments of the citizens who remained here began. Many had fled to France, and so escaped.

"I was the victim of the jealousy of a lawyer, who charged me with accusing my Fascist clients instead of defending them. This charge was so false that I was able to clear myself by presenting a certificate which vindicated me completely. This certificate refers to the first five death sentences which were demanded before the Special Court of the Guard of Tarragona by the previous Loyalist Government, and which I opposed. Two of the cases I saved in Tarragona, and the other three I was also able to save at the Court in Barcelona. After these cases had been decided, no further death penalties were imposed, due to the fact that the Special Court used the decisions on these first cases whenever the death penalty was demanded. Thus, no one else was sentenced to death.

"Though I was completely cleared of the charge against myself, nevertheless there were other charges. The Fascists discovered that I had been an outstanding republican, and that a political party had nominated me as candidate for Deputy in 1936. They found that in my teachings I propagated the Georgeist doctrine, which the judge of the Court qualified as 'anarchistic and anti-patriotic.'

"In my defence, I showed them that the Georgeist doctrine is not anarchistic, and that our doctrine is approved by the Holy See; and I related the story of Dr Edward McGlynn, Pastor of St Stephen's in New York. I also pointed out that General Fanjul, col-

laborator of General Franco, had been Vice-President of the Liga Georgista Espanola, and that our Secretary, Don Arturo Soria, was assassinated by the Communists.

"The Tribunal was very much impressed by the case of Dr McGlynn, but it took them forty-five days to ascertain whether or not Georgeism was a revolutionary doctrine. Since I held no high political position, and since I have never been involved in a crime, I was not sentenced to death, but was given a life sentence. During the forty-five days, however, I was in prison among those sentenced to death. Each night I saw my companions taken out to die, and one night I thought they were going to take me, too. You see, I was on the brink of being the first Georgeist martyr!

"After my sentence was confirmed, I was transferred to the Prison of San Miguel de los Reyes in Valencia, where I remained completely *incomunicado* until August 26, when I was liberated. Due to a reviewing of sentences, mine has been reduced to six years.

"My present status is that of prisoner in my own home, and of course I will not be reinstated in the University to continue my teachings. My immediate problem is to be able to live, since the authorities have confiscated my home and everything I possessed, including my clothing, and even my professional diplomas. I am living now through the kindness of my sister. I hope that the authorities will at least allow me to work as an attorney. If not, I will be compelled to request help from you to approach the Spanish Embassy in Washington to give me a passport to the United States, so that I might establish myself in your country as Professor of Spanish and Economic Philosophy."

Prof Alonso was formerly an instructor of Economics and French at the University of Salamanca. For two years he was lecturer in Spanish at the University of Liverpool, England. In 1934 he paid a brief visit to the United States. He was profoundly impressed by the Henry George School of Social Science, founded two years previously by Oscar Geiger, and he had resolved to create a similar institution in his native country.

The editors of *Land and Freedom* have communicated with Washington and hope to assist Prof Alonso to go to the U.S.A. should the occasion warrant.

I hope to see after this war a Scottish revival led by Scots in Scotland. I hope to see a body of technical experts in research set up to investigate and advise on industries and agriculture. We suffer too much from absentee landlordism. We need taxation of land values, access through modern transport to markets, power schemes, afforestation, and an extensive land settlement plan.

LADY GLEN COATS, in the  
*Scots Independent*, January.